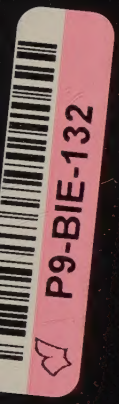
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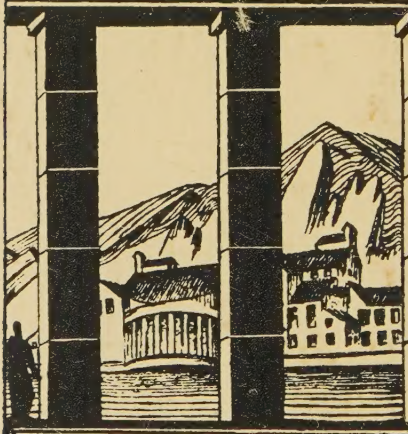

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WHIPPERGINNY

WHIPPERGINNY

BY

ROBERT GRAVES

LONDON

WILLIAM HEINEMANN, LTD.

TO

EDWARD MARSH

First published 1923
Printed in Great Britain

AUTHOR'S NOTE

The poems in this volume cover a period of three years, beginning at the New Year of 1920, except for the rhymes "Henry and Mary," "What did I dream?" and "Mirror, Mirror!" with parts of "An English Wood," "The Bed Post" and of "Unicorn and the White Doe," which are bankrupt stock of 1918, the year in which I was writing *Country Sentiment*. *The Pier Glass*, a volume which followed *Country Sentiment*, similarly contains a few pieces continuing the mood of this year, the desire to escape from a painful war neurosis into an Arcadia of amatory fancy, but the prevailing mood of *The Pier Glass* is aggressive and disciplinary, under the stress of the same neurosis, rather than escapist. *Whipperginny* for a while continues so, but in most of the later pieces will be found evidences of greater detachment in the poet and the appearance of a new series of problems in religion, psychology and philosophy, no less exacting than their predecessors, but, it may be said, of less emotional intensity. The "Interlude" in the middle of the book was written before the appearance of these less lyrical pieces, but must be read as an apology for the book being now even less homogeneous than before. To those who demand unceasing emotional stress in poetry at whatever cost to the poet—I was one of these myself until recently—I have no apology to offer; but only this proverb from the Chinese, that *the petulant*

protests of all the lords and ladies of the Imperial Court will weigh little with the whale when, recovering from his painful excretory condition, he need no longer supply the Guild of Honourable Perfumers with their accustomed weight of ambergris.

ROBERT GRAVES.

The World's End,
Islip.

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WHIPPERGINNY

("A card game, obsolete."—*Standard Dictionary.*)

TO cards we have recourse
  When Time with cruelty runs,
To courtly Bridge for stress of love,
  To Nap for noise of guns.

On fairy earth we tread,
  No present problems vex
Where man's four humours fade to suits,
  With red and black for sex.

Where phantom gains accrue
  By tricks instead of cash,
Where pasteboard federacies of Powers
  In battles-royal clash.

Then read the antique word
  That hangs above this page
As type of mirth-abstracted joy,
  Calm terror, noiseless rage,

A realm of ideal thought,
  Obscured by veils of Time,
Cipher remote enough to stand
  As namesake for my rhyme,

A game to play apart
  When all but crushed with care ;
Let right and left, your jealous hands,
  The lists of love prepare.

THE BEDPOST

Sleepy Betsy from her pillow
Sees the post and ball
Of her sister's wooden bedstead
Shadowed on the wall.

Now this grave young warrior standing
With uncovered head
Tells her stories of old battle,
As she lies in bed.

How the Emperor and the Farmer,
Fighting knee to knee,
Broke their swords but whirled their scabbards
Till they gained the sea.

How the ruler of that shore
Foully broke his oath,
Gave them beds in his sea cavern,
Then stabbed them both.

How the daughters of the Emperor,
Diving boldly through,
Caught and killed their father's murderer,
Old Cro-bar-cru.

How the Farmer's sturdy sons
Fought the giant Gog,
Threw him into Stony Cataract
In the land of Og.

Will and Abel were their names,
Though they went by others ;
He could tell ten thousand stories
Of these lusty brothers.

THE BEDPOST

How the Emperor's elder daughter
Fell in love with Will,
And went with him to the Court of Venus
Over Hoo Hill ;

How Gog's wife encountered Abel
Whom she hated most,
Stole away his arms and helmet,
Turned him to a post.

As a post he shall be rooted
For yet many years,
Until a maiden shall release him
With a fall of tears.

But Betsy likes the bloodier stories,
Clang and clash of fight,
And Abel wanes with the spent candle,
" Sweetheart, good-night ! "

A LOVER SINCE CHILDHOOD

Tangled in thought am I,
Stumble in speech do I ?
Do I blunder and blush for the reason why ?
Wander aloof do I,
Lean over gates and sigh,
Making friends with the bee and the butterfly ?

If thus and thus I do,
Dazed by the thought of you,
Walking my sorrowful way in the early dew,
My heart cut through and through
In this despair for you,
Starved for a word or a look will my hope renew ;

Give then a thought for me
Walking so miserably,
Wanting relief in the friendship of flower or tree ;
Do but remember, we
Once could in love agree,
Swallow your pride, let us be as we used to be.

SONG OF CONTRARIETY

Far away is close at hand,
  Close joined is far away,
Love might come at your command
  Yet will not stay.

At summons of your dream-despair
  She could not disobey,
But slid close down beside you there
  And complaisant lay.

Yet now her flesh and blood consent
  In waking hours of day,
Joy and passion both are spent,
  Fading clean away.

Is the presence empty air,
  Is the spectre clay,
That Love, lent substance by despair,
Wanes, and leaves you lonely there
  On the bridal day ?

THE RIDGE-TOP

Below the ridge a raven flew
And we heard the lost curlew
Mourning out of sight below ;
Mountain tops were touched with snow ;
Even the long dividing plain
Showed no wealth of sheep or grain,
But fields of boulders lay like corn
And raven's croak was shepherd's horn
To slow cloud shadow strayed across
A pasture of thin heath and moss.
The North Wind rose ; I saw him press
With lusty force against your dress,
Moulding your body's inward grace,
And streaming off from your set face ;
So now no longer flesh and blood,
But poised in marble thought you stood,
O wingless Victory, loved of men,
Who could withstand your triumph then ?

SONG IN WINTER

The broken spray left hanging
Can hold his dead leaf longer
Into your glum November
Than this live twig tossed shivering
By your East Wind anger.

Unrepentant, hoping Spring,
Flowery hoods of glory hoping,
Carelessly I sing,
With envy none for the broken spray
When the Spring comes, fallen away.

UNICORN AND THE WHITE DOE

" Alone
Through forests evergreen,
By legend known,
By no eye seen,
Unmated,
Unbaited,
Untrembling between
The shifting shadows,
The sudden echoes,
Deathless I go
Unheard, unseen,"
Says the White Doe.

Unicorn with bursting heart
Breath of love hath drawn
On his desolate crags apart
At rumour of dawn ;

Has volleyed forth his pride
Twenty thousand years mute,
Tossed his horn from side to side,
Lunged with his foot.

" Like a storm of sand I run
Breaking the desert's boundaries,
I go in hiding from the sun
In thick shade of trees.

Straight was the track I took
Across the plains, but here with briar
And mire the tangled alleys crook,
Baulking desire.

And there, what glinted white ?
(A bough still shakes.)
What was it darted from my sight
Through the forest brakes ?

Where are you fled from me ?
I pursue, you fade ;
I run, you hide from me
In the dark glade.

Towering straight the trees grow,
The grass grows thick.
Where you are I do not know,
You fly so quick."

"Seek me not here
Lodged among mortal deer,"
Says the White Doe ;
" Keeping one place
Held by the ties of Space,"
Says the White Doe.
" I
Equally
In air
Above your bare
Hill crest, your basalt lair,
Mirage-reflected drink
At the clear pool's brink ;
With tigers at play
In the glare of day
Blithely I stray;
Under shadow of myrtle
With Phœnix and his Turtle
For all time true ;
With Gryphons at grass
Under the Upas,
Sipping warm dew
That falls hourly new;
I, unattainable
Complete, incomprehensible,

No mate for you.
In sun's beam
Or star-gleam,
No mate for you,
No mate for you,"
Says the White Doe.

SULLEN MOODS

Love, do not count your labour lost
  Though I turn sullen, grim, retired
Even at your side ; my thought is crossed
  With fancies by old longings fired.

And when I answer you, some days
  Vaguely and wildly, do not fear
That my love walks forbidden ways,
  Breaking the ties that hold it here.

If I speak gruffly, this mood is
  Mere indignation at my own
Shortcomings, plagues, uncertainties ;
  I forget the gentler tone.

You, now that you have come to be
  My one beginning, prime and end,
I count at last as wholly me,
  Lover no longer nor yet friend.

Friendship is flattery, though close hid ;
  Must I then flatter my own mind ?
And must (which laws of shame forbid)
  Blind love of you make self-love blind ?

Do not repay me my own coin,
  The sharp rebuke, the frown, the groan ;
Remind me, rather, to disjoin
  Your emanation from my own.

Help me to see you as before
  When overwhelmed and dead, almost,
I stumbled on that secret door
  Which saves the live man from the ghost.

Be once again the distant light,
  Promise of glory, not yet known
In full perfection—wasted quite
  When on my imperfection thrown.

A FALSE REPORT

Are they blind, the lords of Gaza,
That each his fellow urges
"Samson the proud is pillow-smothered,"
They raise mock dirges?

Philistines and dullards,
Turn, look with amaze
At my foxes running in your cornfields
With their tails ablaze,

At bloody jawbone, at bees flitting
From the stark lion's hide:
At these, the gates of well-walled Gaza,
Clanking to my stride.

CHILDREN OF DARKNESS

("In their generation wiser than the children of Light.")

We spurred our parents to the kiss,
Though doubtfully they shrank from this—
Day had no courage to review
What lusty dark alone might do—
Then were we joined from their caress
In heat of midnight, one from two.

This night-seed knew no discontent,
In certitude his changings went ;
Though there were veils about his face,
With forethought, even in that pent place,
Down towards the light his way he bent
To kingdoms of more ample space.

Was Day prime error, that regret
For darkness roars unstifled yet ?
That in this freedom, by faith won,
Only acts of doubt are done ?
That unveiled eyes with tears are wet,
They loathe to gaze upon the sun ?

RICHARD ROE AND JOHN DOE

Richard Roe wished himself *Solomon*
Made cuckold, you should know, by one John Doe ;
Solomon's neck was firm enough to bear
Some score of antlers more than Roe could wear.

Richard Roe wished himself *Alexander*,
Being robbed of house and land by the same hand ;
Ten thousand acres or a principal town
Would have cost *Alexander* scarce a frown.

Richard Roe wished himself *Job* the prophet,
Sunk past reclaim in stinking rags and shame ;
Job's plight was utterly bad, his own even worse,
He found no God to call on or to curse.

He wished himself *Job*, *Solomon*, *Alexander*,
For cunning, patience, power to overthrow
His tyrant, but with heart gone so far rotten
That most of all he wished himself John Doe.

THE DIALECTICIANS

Thought has a bias,
  Direction a bend,
Space its inhibitions,
  Time a dead end.

Is whiteness white ?
  O then, call it black :
Farthest from the truth
  Is yet half-way back.

Effect ordains Cause,
  Head swallowing its tail ;
Does whale engulf sprat,
  Or sprat assume whale ?

Contentions weary,
  It giddies all to think ;
Then kiss, girl, kiss !
  Or drink, fellow, drink !

THE LANDS OF WHIPPERGINNY

("Heaven or Hell or the Lands of Whipperginny."—
Nashe's *Jack Wilton.*)

Come closer yet, sweet honeysuckle, my coney, O my
Jinny,
With a low sun gilding the bloom of the wood.
Be this Heaven, be it Hell, or the Lands of Whipperginny,
It lies in a fairy lustre, it savours most good.

Then stern proud psalms from the chapel on the moors
Waver in the night wind, their firm rhythm broken,
Lugubriously twisted to a howling of whores
Or lent an airy glory too strange to be spoken.

"THE GENERAL ELLIOTT"

He fell in victory's fierce pursuit,
  Holed through and through with shot,
A sabre sweep had hacked him deep
  'Twixt neck and shoulder-knot. . . .

The potman cannot well recall,
  The ostler never knew,
Whether his day was Malplaquet,
  The Boyne, or Waterloo.

But there he hangs for tavern sign,
  With foolish bold regard
For cock and hen and loitering men
  And wagons down the yard.

Raised high above the hayseed world
  He smokes his painted pipe,
And now surveys the orchard ways,
  The damsons clustering ripe.

He sees the churchyard slabs beyond,
  Where country neighbours lie,
Their brief renown set lowly down ;
  His name assaults the sky.

He grips the tankard of brown ale
  That spills a generous foam :
Oft-times he drinks, they say, and winks
  At drunk men lurching home.

'THE GENERAL ELLIOTT'

No upstart hero may usurp
That honoured swinging seat ;
His seasons pass with pipe and glass
Until the tale's complete.

And paint shall keep his buttons bright
Though all the world's forgot
Whether he died for England's pride
By battle, or by pot.

A FIGHT TO THE DEATH

Two blind old men in a blind corridor
  Fought to the death, by sense of sound or touch.
Doom flailed unseen, an iron hook-hand tore
  Flesh from the enemy's ribs who swung the crutch.
One gasped, " She looked on me and smiled, I say,"
So life was battered out, for yea or nay.

OLD WIVES' TALES

Were the tales they told absurd,
  Random tags for a child's ear ?
Soon I mocked at all I heard,
  Though with cause indeed for fear.

Of the mermaids' doleful game
  In deep water I heard tell,
Of lofty dragons blowing flame,
  Of the hornèd fiend of Hell.

Now I have met the mermaid kin
  And find them bound by natural laws,
They have neither tail nor fin,
  But are the deadlier for that cause.

Dragons have no darting tongues,
  Teeth saw-edged nor rattling scales,
No fire issues from their lungs,
  Poison has not slimed their tails.

But they are creatures of dark air,
  Unsubstantial tossing forms,
Thunderclaps of man's despair
  In mid whirl of mental storms.

And there's a true and only fiend
  Worse than prophets prophesy,
Whose full powers to hurt are screened
  Lest the race of man should die.

Ever in vain may courage plot
  The dragon's death with shield and sword,
Or love abjure the mermaid grot,
  Or faith be fixed in one blest word.

Mermaids will not be denied
  Of our last enduring shame,
The dragon flaunts his unpierced hide,
  The fiend makes laughter with God's Name.

CHRISTMAS EVE

On Christmas Eve the brute Creation
  Lift up their heads and speak with human voices ;
The Ox roars out his song of jubilation
  And the Ass rejoices.

They dance for mirth in simple credence
  That man from devildom this day was savèd,
That of his froward spirit he has found riddance ;
  They hymn the Son of David.

Ox and Ass cloistered in stable,
  Break bounds to-night and see what shall astound you,
A second Fall, a second death of Abel,
  Wars renewed around you.

Cabals of great men against small men,
  Mobs, murders, informations, the packed jury,
While Ignorance, the lubber prince of all men,
  Glowers with old-time fury.

Excellent beasts, resign your speaking,
  Tempted in man's own choleric tongue to name him.
Hoof-and-horn vengeance have no thought of wreaking,
  Let your dumb grief shame him.

THE SNAKE AND THE BULL

Snake Bull, my namesake, man of wrath,
By no expense of knives or cloth,
Only by work of muttered charms
Could draw all woman to his arms ;
None whom he summoned might resist
Nor none recall whom once he kissed
And loosed them from his kiss, by whom
This mother-shame had come.

The power of his compelling flame
Was bound in virtue of our name,
But when in secret he taught me
Like him a thief of love to be,
For half his secret I had found
And half explored the wizard ground
Of words, and when giving consent
Out at his heels I went.

Then Fessé, jungle-god whose shape
Is one part man and three parts ape,
Avenger of misuse by man
Of lust that by his art began,
And master of all mimicries
Made tittering laughter in the trees.
With girlish whispers, sighs and giggling
Set the Bull prancing, the Snake wriggling ;
Where leaves were broadest and light dim,
Fessé ambushed him.

Up through the air I saw him swung
To bridal bowers with red flowers hung ;
He choked for mercy like a maid
By his own violent whim betrayed;

Blood broke in fountains from his neck,
I heard his hugged ribs creak and break,
But what the tree-top rites might be
How should I stay to see ?

In terror of the Ape God's power
I changed my person in that hour,
Cast off the livery of my clan,
Over unlawful hills I ran,
I soiled me with forbidden earth.
In nakedness of second birth
I scorched away the Snake's red eyes
Tattoed for name about my thighs,
And slew the Sacred Bull oppressed
With passion on my breast.

The girls of my new tribe are cold,
Amazon, scarred, not soft to hold.
They seek not men, nor are they sought,
Whose children are not theirs, but bought
From outlaw tribes who dwell in trees—
Tamed apes suckle these.

The young men of the tribe are such
That knife or bow they dare not touch,
But in close watching of the skies
And reckoning counts they dim their eyes.
Closed, each by each, in thoughtful bars
They plot the circuits of the stars,
And frozen music dulls their need
Of drink and man-flesh greed.

They hold that virtue from them slips
When eye greets eye or lips touch lips ;
Down to the knee their broad beards fall
And hardly are they men at all.
Possessions they have none, nor schools
For tribal duties, nor close rules,
No gods, no rites, no totem beasts,
No friendships, no love feasts.

Now quit, as they, of gong-roused lust,
The leap of breasts, the scattering dust,
In hermit splendour at my glass
I watch the skies' procession pass,
Tracing my figures on the floor
Of planets' paths and comets' lore ;
In calm amaze I cloak my will,
I gaze, I count, until

Harsh from his House the Bull roars out,
Forked lightning leaps his points about,
Tattoos his shape upon the sky:
Night anger fills the Serpent's eye
With desolating fire for one
Who thought the Serpent's days were done,
And girlish titterings from the trees
Loosen my firm knees.

THE RED RIBBON DREAM

As I stood by the stair-head in the upper hall
The rooms to left and right were locked as before.
It was senseless to hammer at an unreal door
Painted on the plaster of a ten-foot wall.

There was half-light here, piled darkness beyond
Rising up sheer as the mountain of Time,
The blank rock-face that no thought can climb,
Girdled around with the Slough of Despond.

I stood quite dumb, sunk fast in the mire,
Lonely as the first man, or the last man,
Chilled to despair since evening began,
Dazed for the memory of a lost desire.

But a voice said "Easily," and a voice said "Come!"
Easily I followed with no thought of doubt,
Turned to the right hand, and the way stretched out;
The ground held firmly; I was no more dumb.

For that was the place where I longed to be,
And past all hope there the kind lamp shone,
The carpet was holy that my feet were on,
And logs on the fire lay hissing for me.

The cushions were friendship and the chairs were love,
Shaggy with love was the great wolf skin,
The clock ticked "Easily" as I entered in,
"Come," called the bullfinch from his cage above.

Love went before me; it was shining now
From the eyes of a girl by the window wall,
Whose beauty I knew to be fate and all
By the thin red ribbon on her calm brow.

Then I was a hero and a bold boy
Kissing the hand I had never yet kissed ;
I felt red ribbon like a snake twist
In my own thick hair, so I laughed for joy.

* * * * *

I stand by the stair-head in the upper hall ;
The rooms to the left and right are locked as before.
Once I found entrance, but now never more,
And Time leans forward with his glassy wall.

IN PROCESSION

Donne (for example's sake),
Keats, Marlowe, Spenser, Blake,
Shelley and Milton,
Shakespeare and Chaucer, Skelton—
We love them as we know them,
But who could dare outgo them
At their several arts,
At their particular parts
Of wisdom, power and knowledge ?
In the Poets' College
Are no degrees nor stations,
Comparisons, rivals,
Stern examinations,
Class declarations,
Senior survivals ;
No creeds, religions, nations
Combatant together
With mutual damnations.
Or tell me whether
Shelley's hand could take
The laurel wreath from Blake ?
Could Shakespeare make the less
Chaucer's goodliness ?

The poets of old,
Each with his pen of gold
Gloriously writing,
Found no need for fighting,
In common being so rich;
None need take the ditch,
Unless this Chaucer beats
That Chaucer, or this Keats
With other Keats is flyting :
See Donne deny Donne's feats,

Shelley take Shelley down,
Blake snatch at his own crown.
Without comparison aiming high,
Watching with no jealous eye
A neighbour's renown,
Each in his time contended,
But with a mood late ended,
Some manner now put by,
Or force expended,
Sinking a new well when the old ran dry.

So like my masters I
Voice my ambition loud,
In prospect proud,
Treading the poet's road,
In retrospect most humble,
For I stumble and tumble,
I spill my load.

But often,
Half-way to sleep,
On a mountain shagged and steep,
The sudden moment on me comes
With terrible roll of dream drums,
Reverberations, cymbals, horns replying,
When with standards flying,
A cloud of horsemen behind,
The coloured pomps unwind
The Carnival wagons
With their saints and their dragons
On the screen of my teeming mind,
The Creation and Flood
With our Saviour's Blood
And fat Silenus' flagons,
With every rare beast
From the South and East,
Both greatest and least,
On and on,
In endless variable procession.

I stand at the top rungs
Of a ladder reared in the air,
And I speak with strange tongues
So the crowds murmur and stare,
Then volleys again the blare
Of horns, and summer flowers
Fly scattering in showers,
And the Sun rolls in the sky,
While the drums thumping by
Proclaim me . . . .
Oh, then, when I wake
Could I recovering take
And propose on this page
The words of my rage
And my blandishing speech
Steadfast and sage,
Could I stretch and reach
The flowers and the ripe fruit
Laid out at the ladder's foot,
Could I rip a silken shred
From the banner tossed ahead,
Could I call a double flam
From the drums, could the Goat
Horned with gold, could the Ram
With a flank like a barn-door,
The dwarf, the blackamoor,
Could *Jonah and the Whale*
And the *Holy Grail*
With the *Sacking of Rome*
And *Lot at his home*,
The Ape with his platter,
Going clitter-clatter,
The Nymphs and the Satyr,
And every other such matter
Come before me here
Standing and speaking clear
With a "How do ye do?"
And "Who are ye, who?"
Could I show them so to you

That you saw them with me,
Oh then, then I could be
The Prince of all Poetry
With never a peer,
Seeing my way so clear
To unveil mystery.

Telling you of land and sea,
Of Heaven blithe and free,
How I know there to be
Such and such Castles built in Spain,
Telling also of Cockaigne,
Of that glorious kingdom, Cand,
Of the Delectable Land,
The land of Crooked Stiles,
The Fortunate Isles,
Of the more than three score miles
That to Babylon lead,
A pretty city indeed
Built on a four-square plan,
Of the land of the Gold Man
Whose eager horses whinny
In their cribs of gold,
Of the lands of Whipperginny,
Of the land where none grow old.

Especially I could tell
Of the Town of Hell,
A huddle of dirty woes
And houses in endless rows
Straggling across all space ;
Hell has no market-place,
Nor point where four ways meet,
Nor principal street,
Nor barracks, nor Town Hall,
Nor shops at all,
Nor rest for weary feet,
Nor theatre, square, or park,
Nor lights after dark,

Nor churches nor inns,
Nor convenience for sins,
Hell nowhere begins,
Hell nowhere ends,
But over the world extends
Rambling, dreary, limitless, hated well :
The suburbs of itself, I say, is Hell.

But back to the sweets
Of Spenser and Keats
And the calm joy that greets
The chosen of Apollo !
Here let me mope, quirk, holloa
With a gesture that meets
The needs that I follow
In my own fierce way.
Let me be grave-gay
Or merry-sad,
Who rhyming here have had
Marvellous hope of achievement
And deeds of ample scope,
Then deceiving and bereavement
Of this same hope.

HENRY AND MARY

Henry was a worthy king,
  Mary was his queen,
He gave to her a snowdrop,
  Upon a stalk of green.

Then all for his kindness
  And all for his care
She gave him a new-laid egg
  In the garden there.

Love, can you sing ?
  I cannot sing.
Or story-tell ?
  Not one I know.
Then let us play at king and queen,
As down the garden lawns we go.

AN ENGLISH WOOD

This valley wood is hedged
With the set shape of things.
Here sorrows come not edged,
Here are no harpies fledged,
No roc has clapped his wings,
No gryphons wave their stings ;
Here, poised in quietude
Calm elementals brood
On the set shape of things,
They fend away alarms
From this green wood.
Here nothing is that harms,
No bull with lungs of brass,
No toothed or spiny grass,
No tree whose clutching arms
Drink blood when travellers pass,
No mount of Glass.
No bardic tongues unfold
Satires or charms.
Only the lawns are soft,
The tree-stems, grave and old.
Slow branches sway aloft,
The evening air comes cold,
The sunset scatters gold.
Small grasses toss and bend,
Small pathways idly tend
Towards no certain end.

MIRROR, MIRROR !

Mirror, Mirror, tell me,
Am I pretty or plain ?
Or am I downright ugly
And ugly to remain ?

Shall I marry a gentleman ?
Shall I marry a clown ?
Or shall I marry Old Knives-and-Scissors
Shouting through the town ?

WHAT DID I DREAM ?

What did I dream ? I do not know.
The fragments fly like chaff.
Yet, strange, my mind was tickled so
I cannot help but laugh.

Pull the curtains close again,
Tuck my blanket in ;
Must a glorious humour wane
Because birds begin

Discoursing in a restless tone,
Rousing me from sleep—
The finest entertainment known,
And given rag-cheap ?

INTERLUDE : ON PRESERVING A POETICAL FORMULA

(I)

" There's less and less cohesion
In each collection
Of my published poetries ? "
You are taking me to task ?
And " What were my last Royalties ?
Reckoned in pounds, were they, or shillings,
Or even perhaps in pence? "
No, do not ask !
I'm lost, in buyings and sellings.
But please permit only once more for luck
Irreconcilabilities in my book. . . .

For these are all the same stuff really,
The obverse and reverse, if you look closely,
Of busy Imagination's new-coined money ;
And if you watch the blind
Phototropisms of my fluttering mind,
Whether, growing strong, I wrestle Jacob-wise
With fiendish darkness blinking threatfully
Its bale-fire eyes,
Or whether childishly

I dart to Mother-skirts of love and peace
To play with toys until those horrors leave me—
Yet note, whichever way I find release,
By fight or flight
By being harsh or tame,
The SPIRIT'S the same, the Pen-and-Ink's the same.

(II)

Epitaph on an Unfortunate Artist

He found a formula for drawing comic rabbits :
This formula for drawing comic rabbits paid,
So in the end he could not change the tragic habits
This formula for drawing comic rabbits made.

A HISTORY OF PEACE

(Solitudinem faciunt, pacem appellant)

Here rest in peace the bones of Henry Reece,
Dead through his bitter championship of Peace
Against all eagle-nosed and cynic lords
Who keep the *Pax Romana* with their swords.

Henry was only son of Thomas Reece,
Banker and sometime Justice of the Peace,
And of Jane Reece whom Thomas kept in dread
By *Pax Romana* of his board and bed.

THE ROCK BELOW

Comes a muttering from the earth
  Where speedwell grows and daisies grow,
" Pluck these weeds up, root and all,
  Search what hides below."

Root and all I pluck them out ;
  There, close under, I have found
Stumps of thorn with ancient crooks
  Grappled in the ground.

I wrench the thorn-stocks from their hold
  To set a rose-bush in that place ;
Love has pleasure in my roses
  For a summer space.

Yet the bush cries out in grief :
  " Our lowest rootlets turn on rock,
We live in terror of the drought
  Withering crown and stock."

I grow angry with my creature,
  Tear it out and see it die ;
Far beneath I strike the stone,
  Jarring hatefully.

Impotently must I mourn
  Roses never to flower again ?
Are heart and back too slightly built
  For a heaving strain ?

Heave shall break my proud back never,
  Strain shall never burst my heart:
Steely fingers hook in the crack,
  Up the rock shall start.

Now from the deep and frightful pit
  Shoots forth the spiring phœnix-tree
Long despaired in this bleak land,
Holds the air with boughs, with bland
  Fragrance welcome to the bee,
  With fruits of immortality.

AN IDYLL OF OLD AGE

Two gods once visited a hermit couple,
Philemon and his Baucis, old books tell ;
They sampled elder-wine and called it nectar,
Though nectar is the tastier drink by far.
They made ambrosia of pot-herb and lentil,
They ate pease-porridge even, with a will.
Why, and so forth. . . .
But that night in the spare bedroom
Where they lay shivering in the musty gloom,
Hermes and Zeus overheard conversation,
Behind the intervening wall, drag on
In thoughtful snatches through the night. They idly
Listened, and first they heard Philemon sigh :—

Phi. " Since two souls meet and merge at time of marriage,
Conforming to one stature and one age,
An honest token each with each exchanging
Of Only Love unbroken as a ring—
What signified my boyhood's ideal friendship
That stared its ecstasy at eye and lip,
But dared not touch because love seemed too holy
For flesh with flesh in real embrace to lie ? "

Bau. Then Baucis sighed in answer to Philemon,
" Many's the young man that my eye rests on
(Our younger guest to-night provides the instance)
Whose body brings my heart hotter romance
Than your dear face could ever spark within me ;
Often I wish my heart from yours set free."

Phi. " In this wild medley round us of Bought Love,
Free Love and Forced Love and pretentious No-Love,

Let us walk upright, yet with care consider
Whether, in living thus, we do not err.
Why might we not approve adulterous licence
Increasing pleasurable experience ?
What could the soul lose through the body's rapture
With a body not its mate, where thought is pure ? ''

Bau. '' Are children bonds of love ? But even children
Grow up too soon as women and as men,
And in the growing find their own love private,
Meet parent-love with new suspicious hate.
Our favourites run the surest to the Devil
In spite of early cares and all good will.''

Phi. '' Sweetheart, you know that you have my permission
To go your own way and to take love on
Wherever love may signal.''

She replying
Bau. Said, '' I allow you, dearest, the same thing.''

Zeus was struck dumb at this unholy compact,
But Hermes knew the shadow from the fact
And took an oath that for whole chests of money
Neither would faithless to the other be,
Would not and could not, being twined together
In such close love that he for want of her
Removed one night-time from his side, would perish,
And she was magnet-drawn by his least wish.

Eternal Gods deny the sense of humour,
That well might prejudice their infallible power,
So Hermes and King Zeus not once considered,
In treating of this idyll overheard,
That love rehearses after life's defeat
Remembered conflicts of an earlier heat,
Baucis, kind soul, was palsied, withered and bent,
Philemon, too, was ten years impotent.

THE LORD CHAMBERLAIN TELLS OF A FAMOUS MEETING

Unknown to each other in a hostile camp,
Spies of two empire nations unallied,
These heroes met, princes of East and West,
Over a ragged pack of cards, by chance.
Never believe what credulous annalists
Record you in good faith of that encounter.
I was there myself, East's man, and witnessed all.
In the main camp of the Middle Kingdom's army
At a soldier's mess, shortly before Retreat,
East, a pretended trooper, stepping in
Glanced round the room, shortly discerning West,
Who sat dejected at a corner table.
East moved by curiosity or compassion
Pulled out his cards, offering West the cut,
And West, disguised as a travelling ballad-man,
Took and cut ; they played together then
For half an hour or more ; then went their ways.

Never believe such credulous annalists
As tell you, West for sign of recognition,
Greatness to greatness, wit to dexterous wit,
With sleight of magic most extraordinary
Alters the Duty on his Ace of Spades,
Making three-pence three-halfpence ; East, it's said,
For a fantastic sly acknowledgment,
While his grave eyes betoken no surprise,
Makes magic too ; presto, the Knave of Hearts
Nims the Queen's rose and cocks it in his cap
Furtively, so that only West remarks it.
But such was not the fact; contrariwise,
When Proteus meets with Proteus, each annuls
The variability of the other's mind.

Single they stand, casting their mutable cloaks.
So for this present chance, I take my oath
That leaning across and watching the cards close
I caught no hint of prestidigitation.

Never believe approved biographers
Who'll show a sequence of the games then played,
Explaining that the minds of these two princes
Were of such subtlety and such nimbleness
That Whipperginny on the fall of a card
Changed to Bézique or Cribbage or Piquet,
Euchre or Écarté, then back once more,
Each comprehending with no signal shown
The opposing fancies of the other's mind.
It's said, spectators of this play grew dazed,
They turned away, thinking the gamesters drunk.
But I, who sat there watching, keeping score,
Say they observed the rules of but one game
The whole bout, playing neither well nor ill
But slowly, with their thoughts in other channels,
Serene and passionless like wooden men.

Neither believe those elegant essayists
Who reconstruct the princes' conversation
From grotesque fabrics of their own vain brains.
I only know that East gave West a nod,
Asking him careless questions about trade ;
West gave the latest rumours from the front,
Raising of sieges, plots and pillages.
He told a camp-fire yarn to amuse the soldiers
Whereat they all laughed emptily (East laughed too).
He sang a few staves of the latest catch,
And pulling out his roll of rhymes, unfurled it,
Ballads and songs, measured by the yard-rule.
But do not trust the elegant essayists
Who'd have you swallow all they care to tell
Of the riddling speech in painful *double entendre*
That West and East juggled across the cards,
So intricate, so exquisitely resolved
In polished antithetical periods

That by comparison, as you must believe,
Solomon himself faced with the Queen of Sheba
And Bishop Such, preaching before the King,
Joined in one person would have seemed mere trash.
I give my testimony beyond refutal,
Nailing the lie for all who ask the facts.

Pay no heed to those vagabond dramatists
Who, to present this meeting on the stage,
Would make my Prince, stealthily drawing out
A golden quill and stabbing his arm for blood,
Scratch on a vellum slip some hasty sentence
And pass it under the table ; which West signs
With *his* blood, so the treaty's made between them
All unobserved and two far nations wedded
While enemy soldiers loll, yawning, around.
I was there myself, I say, seeing everything.
Truly, this is what passed, that East regarding
West with a steady look and knowing him well,
For an instant let the heavy soldier-mask,
His best protection, a dull cast of face,
Light up with joy, and his eyes shoot out mirth.
West then knew East, checked, and misdealt the cards.
Nothing at all was said, on went the game.
But East bought from West's bag of ballads, after,
Two sombre histories, and some songs for dancing.

Also distrust those allegorical
Painters who treating of this famous scene
Are used to splash the skies with lurching Cupids,
Goddesses with loose hair, and broad-cheeked
Zephyrs ;
They burnish up the soldiers' breastplate steel
Rusted with languor of their long campaign,
To twinkling high-lights of unmixed white paint,
Giving them buskins and tall plumes to wear,
While hard by, in a wanton imagery,
Aquatic Triton thunders on his conch
And Satyrs gape from behind neighbouring trees.
I who was there, sweating in my shirt-sleeves,

Felt no divinity brooding in that mess,
For human splendour gave the gods rebuff.

Do not believe them, seem they never so wise,
Credibly posted with all new research,
Those elegant essayists, vagabond dramatists,
Authentic and approved biographers,
Solemn annalists, allegorical
Painters, each one misleading or misled.
One thing is true, that of all sights I have seen
In any quarter of this world of men,
By night, by day, in court, field, tavern, or barn,
That was the noblest, East encountering West,
Their silent understanding and restraint,
Meeting and parting like the Kings they were
With plain indifference to all circumstance ;
Saying no good-bye, no handclasp and no tears,
But letting speech between them fade away
In casual murmurs and half compliments,
East sauntering out for fresh intelligence,
And West shuffling away, not looking back,
Though each knew well that this chance meeting stood
For turning movement of world history.
And I ? I trembled, knowing these things must be.

THE SEWING BASKET

(Accompanying a wedding present from Jenny Nicholson to Winifred Roberts)

To Winifred
The day she's wed
(Having no gold) I send instead
This sewing basket,
And lovingly
Demand that she,
If ever wanting help from me,
Will surely ask it.

Which being gravely said,
Now to go straight ahead
With a cutting of string,
An unwrapping of paper,
With a haberdasher's flourish,
The airs of a draper,
To review
And search this basket through.

Here's one place full
Of coloured wool,
And various yarn
With which to darn ;
A sampler, too,
I've worked for you,
Lettered from A to Z,
The text of which
In small cross-stitch
Is *Love to Winifred.*

Here's a rag-doll wherein
To thrust the casual pin.
His name is Benjamin
For his ingenuous face ;
Be sure I've not forgotten
Black thread or crochet cotton;
While Brussels lace
Has found a place
Behind the needle-case.
(But the case for the scissors ?
Empty, as you see;
Love must never be sundered
Between you and me.)

Winifred Roberts,
Think of me, do,
When the friends I am sending
Are working for you.
The song of the thimble
Is, " Oh, forget her not."
Says the tape-measure,
" Absent but never forgot."

Benjamin's song
He sings all day long,
Though his voice is not strong:
He hoarsely holloas
More or less as follows :—

Button boxes
Never have locks-es,
For the keys would soon disappear.
But here's a linen button
With a smut on,
And a big bone button
With a cut on,
A pearly and a fancy
Of small significancy,
And the badges of a Fireman and a Fusilier.

Which song he'll alternate
With sounds like a Turkish hubble-bubble
Smoked at a furious rate,
The words are scarcely intelligible :—

(*Prestissimo*) *Needles and ribbons and packets of pins,*
Prints and chintz and odd bodikins,
They'd never mind whether
You laid 'em together
Or one from the other in pockets and tins.

For packets of pins and ribbons and needles
Or odd bodikins and chintz and prints,
Being birds of a feather.
Would huddle together
Like minnows on billows or pennies in mints.

He'll learn to sing more prettily
When you take him out to Italy
On your honeymoon,
(Oh come back soon !)
To Florence or to Rome,
The *prima donnas'* home,
To Padua or to Genoa
Where tenors all sing tra-la-la. . . .

Good-bye, Winifred,
Bless your heart, Ben.
Come back happy
And safe agen.

AGAINST CLOCK AND COMPASSES

" Beauty dwindles into shadow,
Beauty dies, preferred by Fate,
Past the rescue of bold thought.
Sentries drowsed," they say, *" at Beauty's gate."*

" Time duteous to his hour-glass,
Time with unerring sickle,
Garners to a land remote
Where your vows of true love are proved fickle."

" Love chill upon her forehead,
Love fading from her cheek,
Love dulled in either eye,
With voice of love," they say, *" no more to speak."*

I deny to Time his terror ;
Come-and-go prevails not here ;
Spring is constant, loveless winter
Looms, but elsewhere, for he comes not near.

I deny to Space the sorrow ;
No leagues measure love from me ;
Turning boldly from her arms,
Into her arms I shall come certainly.

Time and Space, folly's wonder,
Three-card shufflers, magic-men !
True love is, that none shall say
It ever was, or ever flowers again.

THE AVENGERS

Who grafted quince on Western may,
Sharon's mild rose on Northern briar ?
In loathing since that Gospel day
The two saps flame, the tree's on fire.

The briar-rose weeps for injured right,
May sprouts up red to choke the quince.
With angry throb of equal spite
Our wood leaps maddened ever since.

Then mistletoe, of gods not least,
Kindler of warfare since the Flood,
Against green things of South and East
Voices the vengeance of our blood.

Crusading ivy Southward breaks
And sucks your lordly palms upon,
Our island oak the water takes
To outrage cedared Lebanon.

Our slender ash-twigs feathered fly
Against your vines ; bold buttercup
Pours down his legions ; malt of rye
Inflames and burns your lentils up. . . .

For bloom of quince yet caps the may,
The briar is held by Sharon's rose,
Monsters of thought through earth we stray,
And how remission comes, God knows.

ON THE POET'S BIRTH

A page, a huntsman, and a priest of God,
  Her lovers, met in jealous contrariety,
Equally claiming the sole parenthood
  Of him the perfect crown of their variety.
Then, whom to admit, herself she could not tell ;
That always was her fate, she loved too well.

" But, many-fathered little one," she said,
  " Whether of high or low, of smooth or rough,
Here is your mother whom you brought to bed.
  Acknowledge only me, be this enough,
For such as worship after shall be told
A white dove sired you or a rain of gold."

THE TECHNIQUE OF PERFECTION

Said hermit monk to hermit monk,
" Friend, in this island anchorage
Our life has tranquilly been sunk
From pious youth to pious age,

" In such clear waves of quietness,
Such peace from argument or brawl
That one prime virtue I confess
Has never touched our hearts at all.

" Forgiveness, friend ! who can forgive
But after anger or dissent ?
This never-pardoning life we live
May earn God's blackest punishment."

His friend, resolved to find a ground
For rough dispute between the two
That mutual pardons might abound,
With cunning from his wallet drew

A curious pebble of the beach
And scowled, " This treasure is my own : "
He hoped for sharp unfriendly speech
Or angry snatching at the stone.

But honeyed words his friend outpours,
" Keep it, dear heart, you surely know
Even were it mine it still were yours,
This trifle that delights you so."

The owner, acting wrath, cries, " Brother,
What's this ? Are my deserts so small
You'd give me trifles ? " But the other
Smiles, " Brother, you may take my all."

He then enraged with one so meek,
So unresponsive to his mood,
Most soundly smites the martyr cheek
And rends the island quietude.

The martyr, who till now has feigned
In third degree of craftiness
That meekness is so deep ingrained
No taunt or slight can make it less,

Spits out the tooth in honest wrath,
"You hit too hard, old fool," cried he.
They grapple on the rocky path
That zigzags downward to the sea.

In rising fury strained and stiff
They lunge across the narrow ground ;
They topple headlong from the cliff
And murderously embraced are drowned.

* * * * * *

Here Peter sits : two spirits reach
To sound the knocker at his Gate.
They shower forgiveness each on each,
Beaming triumphant and elate.

But oh, their sweats, their secret fears
Lest clod-souled witnesses may rise
To set a tingling at their ears
And bar the approach to Paradise!

THE SIBYL

Her hand falls helpless : thought amazements fly
  Far overhead, they leave no record mark—
Wild swans urged whistling across dazzled sky,
  Or Gabriel hounds in chorus through the dark.

Yet when she prophesies, each spirit swan,
  Each spectral hound from memory's windy zones,
Flies back to inspire one limb-strewn skeleton
  Of thousands in her valley of dry bones.

There as those life-restored battalions shout,
  Succession flags and Time goes maimed in flight :
From each live gullet twenty swans glide out
  With hell-packs loathlier yet to amaze the night.

Gabriel hounds, a spectral pack hunting the souls of the damned through the air at night : the origin of this belief some find in the strange noise made by the passage of flocks of wild geese or swans.

A CRUSADER

Death, kindly eager to pretend
  Himself my servant in the land of spears,
Humble allegiance at the end
  Broke where the homeward track your castle nears,
Let his white steed before my red steed press
And rapt you from me into quietness.

A NEW PORTRAIT OF JUDITH OF BETHULIA

She trod the grasses grey with dew,
  She hugged the unlikely head ;
Avenging where the warrior Jew
  Incontinent had fled.

The bearded lips writhed ever more
  At this increase of shame—
Killed by a girl, pretending whore,
  Gone scatheless as she came !

His doom yet loathlier that he knew
  Hers was no nation-pride,
No high religion snatched and slew
  Where he lay stupefied.

Nebuchadnezzar's duke enticed
  To pay a megrim's fee ?
Assyrian valour sacrificed
  For a boudoir dignity ?

" Only for this, that some tall knave
  Had scorned her welcoming bed,
For this, the assault, the stroke, the grave,"
  Groaned Holofernes' head.

A REVERSAL

The old man in his fast car
  Leaves Achilles lagging,
The old man with his long gun
  Outshoots Ulysses' bow,
Nestor in his botched old age
  Rivals Ajax bragging,
To Nestor's honeyed courtship
  Could Helen say " No " ?

Yet, ancient, since you borrow
  From youth the strength and speed,
Seducing as an equal
  His playmates in the night,
He, robbed, assumes your sceptre,
  He overgoes your rede,
And with his brown and lively hairs
  Out-prophesies your white.

THE MARTYRED DECADENTS: A SYMPATHETIC SATIRE

We strain our strings thus tight,
  Our voices pitch thus high,
A song to indite
  That nevermore shall die.

The Poet being divine
  Admits no social sin,
Spurring with wine
  And lust the Muse within.

Finding no use at all
  In arms or civic deeds,
Perched on a wall
  Fulfilling fancy's needs.

Let parents, children, wife,
  Be ghosts beside his art,
Be this his life
  To hug the snake to his heart.

Sad souls, the more we stress
  The advantage of our crown,
So much the less
  Our welcome by the Town,

By the gross and rootling hog
  Who grunts nor lifts his head,
By jealous dog
  Or old ass thistle-fed.

By so much less their praise,
  By so much more our glory.
Grim pride outweighs
  The anguish of our story.

We strain our strings thus tight,
  Our voices pitch thus high,
To enforce our right
  Over futurity.

EPIGRAMS

ON CHRISTOPHER MARLOWE

Here ranted Isaac's elder son,
The proud shag-breasted godless one,
From whom observant Smooth-Cheek stole
Birthright, blessing, hunter's soul.

A VILLAGE CONFLICT

The cottage damson laden as could be
Scowls at the Manor House magnolia tree
That year by year within its thoughtless powers
Yields flowers and leaves and flowers and leaves and flowers,
While the Magnolia shudders as in fear,
" *Figurez-vous !* two sackfuls every year ! "

DEDICATORY

Dolon, analyst of souls,
To the Graces hangs up here
His shrimp-net rotting into holes
And oozy from the infernal mere ;
He wreathes his gift around with cress,
Lush harvest of the public cess.

TO MY COLLATERAL ANCESTOR, REV. R. GRAVES, THE FRIEND OF THE POET SHENSTONE AND AUTHOR OF *THE SPIRITUAL QUIXOTE:* ON RECEIPT OF A PRESS-CUTTING INTENDED FOR HIM.

O friend of Shenstone, do you frown
  In realms remote from me
When Messrs Durrant send you down
  By inadvertency
Clippings identifying you
  With some dim man in the moon,
A Spiritual Quixote, true,
  But friend of S. Sassoon ?

"A VEHICLE, TO WIT, A BICYLE."

(Dedicated, without permission, to my friend P. C. Flowers)

"My front-lamp, constable ? Why, man, the moon !
  My rear-lamp ? Shining there ten yards behind me,
Warm parlour lamplight of *The Dish and Spoon !*"
  But for all my fancy talk, they would have fined me,
Had I not set a rather sly half-crown
  Winking under the rays of my front lamp :
Goodwill towards men disturbed the official frown,
  My rear-light beckoned through the evening's damp.

MOTTO TO A BOOK OF EMBLEMS

Though you read these, but understand not, curse not !
  Or though you read and understand, yet praise not !
What poet weaves a better knot or worse knot
  Untangling which, your own lives you unbrace not ?

THE BOWL AND RIM

The bearded rabbi, the meek friar,
  Linked by their ankles in one cell,
Through joint distress of dungeon mire
  Learned each to love his neighbour well.

When four years passed and five and six,
  When seven years brought them no release,
The Jew embraced the crucifix,
  The friar assumed phylacteries.

Then every Sunday, keeping score,
  And every Sabbath in this hymn
They reconciled an age-long war
  Between the platter's bowl and rim.

Together.
Man-like he lived, but God-like died,
  All hatred from His thought removed,
Imperfect until crucified,
  In crucifixion well-beloved.

The Friar.
If they did wrong, He too did wrong,
  (For Love admits no contraries)
In blind religion rooted strong
  Both Jesus and the Pharisees.

" Love all men as thyself," said He.
  Said they, " Be just with man or dog,"
" But only loathe a Pharisee,"
  " But crucify this demagogue."

He died forgiving on the Tree
To make amends for earlier spite,
They raised him up their God to be,
And black with black accomplished white.

The Rabbi.
When He again descends on man
As chief of Scribes and Pharisees,
With loathing for the Publican,
The maimed and halt His enemies,

And when a not less formal fate
Than Pilate's justice and the Rood,
His righteous angers expiate
To make men think Him wholly good,

Then He again will have done wrong,
If God be Love for every man,
For lewd and lettered, weak and strong,
For Pharisee or Publican,

Together.
But like a God He will have died,
All hatred from His thought removed,
Imperfect until crucified,
In crucifixion well-beloved.

A FORCED MUSIC

Of Love he sang, full-hearted one.
But when the song was done
The King demanded more,
Ay, and commanded more.
The boy found nothing for encore,
Words, melodies, none :
Ashamed the song's glad rise and plaintive fall
Had so charmed King and Queen and all.

He sang the same verse once again,
But urging less Love's pain,
With altered time and key
He showed variety,
Seemed to refresh the harmony
Of his only strain,
So still the glad rise and the plaintive fall
Could charm the King, the Queen, and all.

He of his song then wearying ceased,
But was not yet released ;
The Queen's request was *More*,
And her behest was *More*.
He played of random notes some score,
He found his rhymes at least—
Then suddenly let his twangling harp down fall
And fled in tears from King and Queen and all.

THE TURN OF A PAGE

He suddenly, the page read as it turned,
Died.
The indignant eye discerned
No sense. " Good page, turn back," it cried
(Happily evermore was cheated).
After these things he suddenly died,
The truthful page repeated.

" Turn back yon earlier pages, nine or ten,
To *Him she loved* and *He alone of men.*
Now change the sentence, page ! " But still it read
He suddenly died : they scarce had time to kiss.
" Read on, ungentle reader," the book said,
" Resign your hopes to this."

The eye could not resign, restless in grief,
But darting forward to a later leaf
Found *Him she loved* and *He alone of men.*
Oh, who this He was, being a second He
Confused the plan ; the book spoke sternly then,
" Read page by page and see ! "

THE MANIFESTATION IN THE TEMPLE

On the High Feast Day in that reverent space
Between the Sacrifice and the word of Grace,
I, come to town with a merry-making throng
To pay my tithes and join in the season's song,
Closing my eyes, there prayed—and was hurried far
Beyond what ages I know not, or what star,
To a land of thought remote from the breastplate glint
And the white bull's blood that flows from the knife of flint,
Then, in this movement, being not I but part
In the fellowship of the universal heart,
I sucked a strength from the primal fount of strength,
I thought and worked omnipotence. At length
Hit in my high flight by some sorry thought
Back to the sweat of the soil-bound I was caught
And asked in pique what enemy had worked this,
What folly or anger thrust against my bliss ?
Then I grew aware of the savour of sandal-wood
With noise of a distant fluting, and one who stood
Nudging my elbow breathed " Oh, miracle ! See ! "
The folk gape wonder, urge tumultuously,
They fling them down on their faces every one,
Some joyfully weep, others for anguish moan.
Lo, the tall gilt image of God at the altar niche
Wavers and stirs, we see his raiment twitch.
Now he stands and signs benediction with his rod.
The courtyard quakes, the fountains gush with blood.
The whistling scurry and throb of spirit wings
Distresses man and child. Now a bird-voice sings,
And a loud throat bellows, that every creature hears,
A sign to himself he must lay aside his fears.

It babbles an antique tongue, and threatening, pleads
Prompt sacrifice and a care for priestly needs,
Wholeness of heart, the putting away of wrath,
A generous measure for wine, for oil, for cloth,
A holding fast to the law that the Stones ordain,
And the rites of the Temple watch that ye maintain
Lest fire and ashes down from the mountain rain!
With expectance of goodly harvest and rain in Spring
To such as perform the will of the Jealous King.
To his priestly servants hearken !
The syllables die.
Now up from the congregation issues a sigh
As of stopped breath slow released. But here stands one
Who has kept his feet though the others fell like stone,
Who prays with outstretched palms, standing alone,
To a God who is speechless, not to be known by touch,
By sight, sound, scent. And I cry, " Not overmuch
Do I love this juggling blasphemy, O High Priest.
Or do you deny your part here ? Then, at least,
An honest citizen of this honest town
May preach these nightmare apparitions down,
These blundering, perfumed noises come to tell
No more than a priest-instructed folk knows well.
Out, meddlesome Imps, whatever Powers you be,
Break not true prayer between my God and me."

TO ANY SAINT

You turn the unsmitten other cheek,
In silence welcoming God's grace,
Disdaining, though they scourge, to speak,
Smiling forgiveness face to face.

You plunge your arms in tyrant flame,
From ravening beasts you do not fly,
Calling aloud on one sweet Name,
Hosannah-singing till you die.

So angered by your undefeat,
Revenge through Christ they meditate,
Disciples at the bishop's feet
They learn this newer sort of hate,

This unresisting meek assault
On furious foe or stubborn friend,
This virtue purged of every fault
By furtherance of the martyr's end,

This baffling stroke of naked pride,
When satires fail and curses fail
To pierce the justice's tough hide,
To abash the cynics of the jail.

Oh, not less violent, not less keen
And barbèd more than murder's blade !
" The brook," you sigh, " that washes clean,
The flower of love that will not fade ! "

A DEWDROP

The dewdrop carries in its eye
Snowdon and Hebog, sea and sky,
Twelve lakes at least, woods, rivers, moors,
And half a county's out-of-doors :
Trembling beneath a wind-flower's shield
In this remote and rocky field.

But why should man in God's Name stress
The dewdrop's inconspicuousness
When to lakes, woods, the estuary,
Hebog and Snowdon, sky and sea,
This dewdrop falling from its leaf
Can spread amazement near to grief,
As it were a world distinct in mould
Lost with its beauty ages old ?

A VALENTINE

The hunter to the husbandman
Pays tribute since our love began,
And to love-loyalty dedicates
The phantom kills he meditates.
Let me embrace, embracing you,
Beauty of other shape and hue,
Odd glinting graces of which none
Shone more than candle to your sun,
Your well-kissed hand was beckoning me
In unfamiliar imagery—
Smile your forgiveness ; each bright ghost
Dives in love's glory and is lost,
Yielding your comprehensive pride
A homage, even to suicide.

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